



Japan: Children's Day

Pre-visit Activity: Background Reading

Japan is an island country located in the Pacific Ocean off the coast of Asia. Although it has four main islands, it also has more than 3,000 islands stretching for 3,000 kilometers (1,864 miles) from north to south. The four main islands are Hokkaido, Honshu, Shikoku and Kyushu. The total area of the country is about the same as the country of Germany, or the U.S. state of California.

Japan is located in the part of the world called the "Ring of Fire," so it contains many hot springs, earthquakes, and volcanoes. In fact, 80% of the land is covered by mountains. Mt. Fuji is Japan's tallest mountain. It is 3,776 meters (12,388 feet) tall. The geography of a place affects the culture or the way of life of a group of people who live in that place. One part of culture is the way people celebrate.

For centuries Japan celebrated Boy's Day on the 5th day of the 5th month. After World War II the festival became known as Children's Day or *Kodomo-no-hi*, a national holiday celebrating the healthy growth of all children—both boys and girls. All over Japan, people put up special decorations, inside and outside, reflecting Japan's samurai history.

Outside, people tie koi fish streamers or windsocks in front of the house, one for each child in the family. Sometimes, families include larger koi representing the mother and father. Wild koi symbolize courage and strength because of their ability to swim up a waterfall. When the wind blows through these streamers, it looks like the fish are swimming. Inside, a full celebratory display might include an arrangement of irises, the seasonal flower whose leaves are used in mock sword fights; a miniature set of samurai armor with helmet, sword, and bow/arrow; and folk hero dolls.

There are also special foods eaten on this day. Chimaki is a sweetened sticky rice treat on a stick that's wrapped in bamboo leaves and steamed. Kashiwamochi are rice cakes with sweet bean paste inside and wrapped in oak leaves.

At night is time for a very special bath. Shobu leaves are added to the hot water. This tradition dates back to the time when Japan was a farming society. The shobu leaves helped strengthen people to endure the heat and hard work of the upcoming summer months.

Source: <http://www.globalroadwarrior.com/#mode=country®ionId=75&uri=country-content&nid=20.38&key=facts-holidays>

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Pre-visit Activity: Background Reading Questions

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. What is the purpose of Children's Day?

2. Special decorations are put up inside as well as outside the home. These decorations reflect Japan's _____ history.

3. _____ fly outside homes.

4. Wild koi fish symbolize _____ and _____ because they can _____ up a waterfall.

5. When the wind blows through the streamers, it looks like the fish are _____.

6. Name three items that are part of a display inside the home.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

7. Describe the two special sweets that are eaten on this day.

chimaki _____

kashiwamochi _____

8. Why are shobu leaves added to the special nighttime hot bath water?



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Pre-visit Activity: Background Reading Questions

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. What is the purpose of Children's Day?

The purpose is to celebrate the healthy growth of all children—both girls and boys.

2. Special decorations are put up inside as well as outside the home. These decorations reflect Japan's **samurai** history.

3. **Koi streamers or windsocks** fly outside homes.

4. Wild koi symbolize **courage** and **strength** because they can **swim** up a waterfall.

5. When the wind blows through the streamers, it looks like the fish are **swimming**.

6. Name three items that are part of a display inside the home.

1. **an arrangement of irises**

2. **a miniature set of samurai armor with helmet, sword, and bow/arrow**

3. **folk hero dolls**

7. Describe the two special sweets that are eaten on this day.

1. chimaki - **sweetened sticky rice on a stick wrapped in bamboo leaves**

2. kashiwamochi - **rice cakes with sweet bean paste inside, wrapped in oak leaves**

8. Why are shobu leaves added to the special nighttime hot bath water?

This tradition dates back to the time when Japan was a farming society. The shobu leaves helped strengthen people to endure the heat and hard work of summer.